

# Turbulence

<http://www.Turbulence.org>

Helen Thorington



Now in its second year, Turbulence is both an art site on the World Wide Web and an enlarging group of artists who have created for it and who meet regularly to discuss their work, contribute to the overall development of the online site, develop new, collaborative projects, and assist one another with the sometimes awesome task of keeping up with web developments.

The Turbulence project has two main goals. The first is to provide artists, from all disciplines and with varying degrees of online experience with the opportunity to explore the specific characteristics of the web medium, and make use of the multimedia and online technologies. The second is to provide substantive new work that will improve the quality of the Internet environment and enhance the experience, skills and understanding of users through example, online discussion and collaborative efforts.

Turbulence commissions a wide variety of artists. Their backgrounds may be in literature, music, the visual, performing and/or media arts. They may be known artists who have no

experience with multimedia technologies or artists already engaged in expanding the technologies of multimedia.

In general, Turbulence looks for works that allow users to interact with the content, add to it and feed the results back to the Internet site. It launched on April 1, 1996 with a narrative work, *North Country* by Helen Thorington with Eric Scheffer. *North Country*, which centers around an unidentified skeleton found in the woods of upstate New York, makes extensive use of RealAudio and it offers its users the opportunity to help determine the direction of the story.

*North Country* was followed in 1996 by five additional works: Harris Skibell's *Snuff*, a Java-based work that sniffs out, retrieves and collates "competing" media on the Web, and visibly and perceptibly filters their text, graphic and audio content, leaving the remains on the snuff site; Jonathan Giles' *MRT*, which presents an elaborate symphony of small machines, and makes extensive use of QuickTime movies and sound; Marianne Petit's *The Grimm Tale*, an interactive narrative based on one of the Grimm brothers' fairy tales; *notwalls*, a virtual reality construction by architect Laurel Wilson that poses 3-D space against the flat space of the browser page; and *Vocabulary*, an interactive musical work by composer Christine Baczewska, where users can recompose Baczewska's vocal composition.

These works were followed in 1997 by John Hudak's *Artifacts*, which is built around the RealAudio sounds [or artifacts] you hate to hear when you listen to sound on the web; Benton Bainbridge's *Hootenany Manifestation*, which likens the Internet to the early American frontier where the huckster operated freely; and John Nielson's *Radio Stare* which combines Nielson's own rhythms with uncontrolled feeds from a scanner, making it a voyeuristic work, in a way, and a unique-to-the-web kind of project.

While most of Turbulence's works have been the creations of individual artists, the group has also taken part in networked activities. These include an 8-week experimental exhibition of networked digital worlds on the Internet organized for the MIT List Visual Arts Center. Over an eight week period, from January 25-March 29, 1997, Turbulence artists Helen Thorington, Nick Didkovsky and others, created and delivered simultaneously to the Internet and to the List Center by RealAudio a live improvisational sound composition known as *Turbulence*.

Jonathan Giles whose work *MRT* can be seen on the Turbulence site, has also given a series of Internet performances that make use of CU-SeeMe technology. For these he has made materials — principally sound and background graphics — available to users in advance so that they can contribute to and enhance their own version of the CU-See Me performance. There are plans for the development of a group performance series, to take place locally, in New York City, and simultaneously on the web.

Turbulence has also developed an interactive drama project for the web. Called *Nine Points of Entry*, the initial contributions were made by three Russian artists; three Belgian artists; and three American artists. Users are invited to use these contributions as points of entry into a work they will write.

Plans for the future include the development of an additional Turbulence site that makes use of an object-oriented relational database and a set of specially developed procedures and tools that make complex interactions possible, both between the materials in the database, and between them and data stored in other available databases.

Behind the Turbulence site and the artists, and responsible for the administration and the continuance of the project is the not-for-profit organization, New Radio and Performing Arts [NRPA] and its Executive Director, Helen Thorington.